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RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 9337
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 002571

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DEPARTMENT PASS USTR FOR AUSTRS STRATFORD AND CUTLER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/10/2031

TAGS: [PREL](#) [ENRG](#) [ECON](#) [CH](#) [JA](#)

SUBJECT: JAPAN DETECTS IMPROVED ATMOSPHERE WITH CHINA

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Joe Donovan. Reasons:1.4(b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a read out of the May 7-9 Japan-China vice ministerial, MOFA assessed that the PRC is seeking to improve the "atmosphere" of the bilateral relationship. MOFA believes that Beijing now understands that holding bilateral relations hostage to the Yasukuni issue is not in China's interests and is doing what it can to move relations forward through dialogue and exchange programs. One effort is to seek an early meeting between the two countries' foreign ministers. Another is a high-school student exchange program. In the vice-ministerial meetings, Japan and China set the next date for talks on East China gas exploration and confirmed their mutual understandings on abandoned chemical weapons and the Six-Party Talks. End Summary.

Improved Atmosphere

¶2. (C) On May 11, MOFA Asian Affairs Bureau China Division Principal Deputy Director Kosei Nomura provided Embassy Tokyo political officer with a read out of the May 7-9 meeting in Beijing between Vice Minister Shotaro Yachi and Executive Vice Minister Dai Bingguo. Noting that the meetings took place in Beijing and Dai's hometown of Guiyang in Southwest China, Nomura observed that this was the fifth such meeting between the two vice ministers since their dialogue began one year ago. Nomura stated that in its discussions with Yachi, China seemed to be trying to improve the "atmosphere" of the bilateral relationship. Although the PRC still strongly opposes the prime minister's visits to Yasukuni shrine, Beijing appears to have recognized that holding up progress in the bilateral relationship because of that one issue is not in China's interests, he stated. Consequently, Beijing now appears to be doing what it can to move the relationship forward, he asserted.

Foreign Ministers Meeting

¶3. (C) Nomura suggested that evidence of the PRC's new approach to its relations with Japan is the agreement to pursue the possibility of a meeting between the two countries' foreign ministers on the margins of the upcoming Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) meeting in Qatar later this

month. Although attendance at the meeting by both foreign ministers is still uncertain, the two sides did agree to consider that venue as one possibility for such a meeting. As the two ministers have not met since May 2005, a bilateral ministerial meeting would be a big step forward, Nomura said.

Exchange Program

¶4. (C) Another effort to improve the bilateral relationship is the initiation of a high-school student exchange program, Nomura stated. This week 200 Chinese students will arrive in Japan for a ten-day stay that includes living with a Japanese family. The effort is part of the Japan-China 21st Century Exchange Program that will see 1100 PRC high-school students come to Japan this year for short-term stays and 150 students on longer two-month to one-year visits. Yachi and Dai discussed the mutual desire to begin at an early date the Chinese program inviting Japanese students to the PRC. Nomura reported that Dai strongly supported the people-to-people exchange program and noted that efforts to improve the Japan-China relations through dialogue and such exchanges seemed to be important to the Chinese side.

East China Sea Gas Talks

¶5. (C) Nomura said that Yachi and Dai agreed that the next session of the dialogue on gas exploration in the East China Sea would be held in Tokyo on or about May 18. Although neither side can accept the other's proposal for joint development of the area's hydrocarbon resources, the continuation of the dialogue is an important step in itself,

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Nomura contended.

Abandoned Chemical Weapons and Six-Party Talks

¶6. (C) The two sides agreed to cooperate on the construction of a facility in Jilin Province to dispose of abandoned Japanese World War II chemical weapons, Nomura noted. Yachi and Dai also reiterated the two countries' commitment to resolving the North Korean nuclear weapons issue in the Six-Party Talks and to resume the talks as soon as possible. Acknowledging that these were not new developments, he averred that it was useful to confirm these points at the vice-ministerial level.

SCHIEFFER